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# Living outside the box

## Tutu approaches visual art with a unique medium

By JENNIFER BRUMMETT

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**V**isual artist Tutu, aka Mary Ruth Maggard, is partial to bright, bold colors. She always has been drawn to them because of a visual impairment. Vivid colors permeate her artwork, although lately she has worked in a more muted color palette. She never thought she would be a visual artist, but she has created quite a stir with her unique paint-chip art in the two or so years that she has been creating it. "Tutu" was a nickname she had when she was a kid. She comes from a family of nine, and all the kids had nicknames.

"Now I'm known as Tutu all over the place and I love that."

Her current exhibit at the Boyle County Public Library is set up for school children, Tutu says. The library is a great place to exhibit because of the variety of people who visit. School groups are invited to visit the exhibit.

### If you go:

#### Colorful collages by Tutu

Through January  
Boyle County  
Public Library  
Open during  
regular business  
hours

"It looks childlike," she explains, adding her artwork has its more grown-up elements, too.

Her newest favorite work is titled "Nitty Gritty City" and features a deviation from her earlier work.

"In the beginning, everything was in primary colors," says Tutu, who is a member of Wilderness Trace Art League and Gathering Artists. "Everything was whimsical."

But she wanted to explore other settings, such as "Nitty Gritty City's" cityscape, created in more subdued colors. "Horse On A Hill," which was highlighted in Equestrian magazine's November gift guide, also features the muted color palette.

"Every now and then I get an idea of something I want to cut out," Tutu explains. "Nitty Gritty City" was a title first. I pretty much trust (the works) are turning out the way they need to.

"I make things that suit me. ... If I like it, I've found, others like it."

Every now and then she has someone in mind when she is doing a picture, although that person doesn't buy that piece, necessarily. Tutu says she loves doing commissioned work, of which she has created several.

It all started with paint sample cards Tutu had from working on her house. She didn't want to throw them away, so she took scissors to them.

"I started out doing tulips and fish," she explains as she points to such themes in the pictures on the walls at the library. "Fish are simple — they're a teardrop turned sideways. The lips are hearts."

Tutu buys paint chips from different places. She works under a skylight, and notes her work looks different to her from what it looks like to the public.

Tutu previously had an exhibit at McDowell Wellness Center titled "Secret Life of Fish." One of the works at the library with a fish theme is "Another Fish Frenzy At A Purse Sale." The artist says the titles of her works are important to her, too. She loves "Cookies For Breakfast," because she herself likes to eat cookies for breakfast. She believes most women do.

In a case nearby are pieces created around Cocoa, Tutu's teddy bear. She did his portrait he says, then created a series of adventures for him, such as when he ran away from home to join the Army, and visited Hawaii. There's also a picture of Cocoa writing a letter,



Mary Ruth Maggard's unconventional art — she's created 200 pieces in two years and sold most of them — continues to excite her. "I make things that suit me. ... If I like it, I've found, others like it."



Photos/Jennifer Brummett

"Nitty Gritty City" represents a change in colors for visual artist Tutu. The work is her current favorite among the many she has on exhibit at the Boyle County Public Library, and for sale.

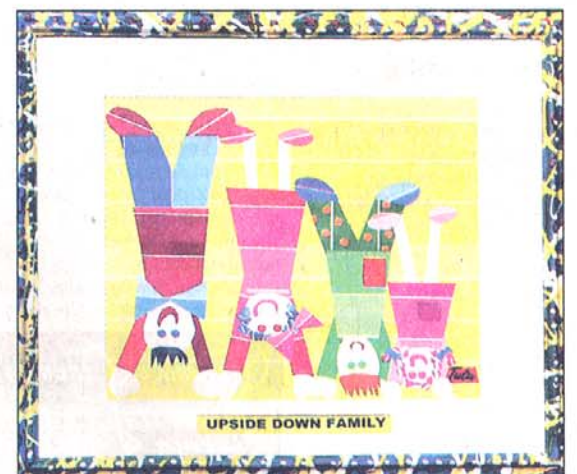
See TUTU, on E3



Horse On A Hill



Another Fish Frenzy at a Purse Sale



Upside Down Family

## TUTU, from E1

which brought other bears to him. That piece is titled "Bears Are Coming."

She sold a large picture to the University of Kentucky Center for Rural Health in Hazard titled "One Trick Pony With Barnyard Friends." That was one of her happiest moments as a visual artist, Tutu says.

"Sick children will look at it," she explains. "That was a really wonderful moment."

Her work is all over the place, in places as far away as Utah, Key West, Florida, and Scotland.

"The response is always positive (with visual art)," notes Tutu, who divides her time between Danville and a farm in Owsley County. "I've never done anything where people say, 'I love that.' But I can't take credit for this. It just happens."

"It's just fun. I never in my life imagined having this much fun. I can do it all day long in my pajamas."

She paints many of the frames for the pictures, often with a "paint drip finish."

"I'm particular about the frames that are chosen," Tutu notes.

She says she has wonderful framers and printers who help her with her art. Tutu makes cards from her prints, she adds. The Web site has been advantageous as well, she

says. Currently, she is designing a mailer to introduce her Web site.

It's hard to put her work out there, Tutu says, and let other people see it. She has to let go of pride and ego and look at her work through others' eyes. Her daughter, Amy, helps her by being a good critic of her work, Tutu says.

Tutu has designed logos for businesses. She hopes to sell her designs to greeting card companies as well as illustrate children's books. She also would like to design fabric.

"I would like my designs to be printed on fabric" — there could be a Tutu in every home.

Her unconventional art — she's created 200 pieces in two years and sold most of them — continues to excite her, after stints as an actress and writer. She has illustrated an as-yet unpublished children's book written by her son, Rob.

Tutu has received a lot of support from other visual artists, she says.

"Other artists are incredible," Tutu says. "They are very generous. They work together very well. It is invaluable to an artist to spend time with another artist."

"It stimulates me to create another picture. ... I think outside the box. I live outside the box. It's just a world view."

**On the Net:**  
[www.tutuoriginals.com](http://www.tutuoriginals.com)